

## **A Mini Youth Farmer's Market Takes to the Road Through NC Fruits & Veggies Mini Grant and Creative Vision of Lee County 4-H and Cooperative Extension Agents**

To engage more people in the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, Bill Stone, NC Cooperative Extension Agent in Lee County, envisioned a convenient design solution. Using \$1000 award money from a 2010 NC Fruits & Veggies Mini Grant<sup>1</sup> and lots of excited 4-H youth, Bill along with Mark Rice, also an extension specialist at NCSU as well as leader of a Baptist men's group in Raleigh, put the idea for a mobile produce stand into action.



The idea for a farm on wheels really stemmed not only from the growth in popularity of youth gardening, but particularly a new youth gardening project in Lee County called “4-H Seed to Feed.” This hybrid garden/service project is gathering youth



organizations in the community along with 4-H members to plant vegetable gardens in their area of which ½ of the produce grown will be donated to local food banks and ½ sold from the new Mobile Youth Farmer's Market. Money earned from sales of fruits & veggies will help to fight local food insecurity, a 2010 4-H initiative called “Hungry to Help.”

The design for the mobile veggie stand was developed by volunteers, many from Oak Ranch, a boys and girls home for troubled youth and their families located near Sanford, as well as eleven 4-H clubs in Lee County. Constructed on campus at NCSU, the stand was built as a volunteer project by Mark's Baptist men's group. Painting was

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<sup>1</sup> The NC Fruits & Veggies Mini Grants were provided by the NC Fruits & Veggies Nutrition Coalition ([www.fruitsandveggiesnc.com](http://www.fruitsandveggiesnc.com)). The one-time funding used for sponsoring the grant came from revenue and sponsorships generated by the Coalition.

completed by youth volunteers using the bright, colorful green and white colors of 4-H. Storage bins were purchased as well as a trailer with rear stabilizers to transport the fruit and veggie stand. Funds from Lee County 4-H were used for the purchase of the trailer, while money for stabilizers came from NC Fruits & Veggies Mini Grant money allowing the youth to walk safely on the trailer when selling their produce.

Falling behind schedule last summer, the construction of the Mobile Youth Farmer's Market was not completed in time for it to be put to use, but that is certainly not the case for this season! There are lots of spring and summer plans for the promotion of fresh, local vegetables and healthy eating using the Mobile Youth Farmer's Market. On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the stand was filled with local produce and showcased at the Healthy Family Festival at the civic center in Lee County. This event promoting healthy lifestyle and eating fresh, locally grown produce is a



Sandhill Farm to Table initiative through the Cooperative Extension Agency. Other festivals, parades and outdoor events are planned for the mobile produce stand with its versatility allowing groups to adjust the focus of the display to promote a variety of healthy initiatives other than just local agriculture.

Lee County has eleven 4-H clubs along with residents of Oak Ranch eligible to use the mobile market for sales and promotion of fruit and vegetable projects. It is estimated 500 customers will gain increased awareness of the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables through the youth and their mobile market along with assistance from the Sanford Farmers Market, the Senior Farmers' Market and various other community health and wellness events. Monthly gardening workshops will keep the youth knowledgeable about nutrition and seasonal produce. The project has allowed hands on learning of market sign design, display of produce, using scales and counting change as well as interaction with local residents as these budding entrepreneurs proudly market the produce they have grown themselves. With the ultimate goal of encouraging the growing, promotion, and consumption of fresh, local produce, to develop entrepreneurial skills in local young people and to develop a permanent youth presence at the Sanford Farmers' Market, these grant recipients in Lee County are well on their way.

Contact Lee County 4-H for more information on planned activities at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/lee/Leepage/4-H/SummerFun.php> or Bill Stone directly at [bill\\_stone@ncsu.edu](mailto:bill_stone@ncsu.edu).